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MESSAGE

MONTANA. GOVERNOR (ARONSON)

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MESSAGE

of

Governor J. Hugo Aronson

to the

Thirty-third Legislative Assembly

of the

STATE OF MONTANA

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GOVERNOR'S MESSAGE

Mr. President, Mr. Speaker and Members of the 33rd Legislative Assembly:

As shortly you will find out, the people of Montana did not select an orator or a politician as their Governor. So, you will have to bear with me for the next few minutes.

We, the hired women and men of all the people of Montana, have a job to do. That job requires the best we can contribute. We need and must have the unselfish help of everyone.

Our goal is to do our best for Montana and the nation and to protect the heritage of our children. There is no place for partisan politics, sectionalism or special privilege.

WE CAN AND MUST SUBSTITUTE BUSINESS FOR POLITICS.

Every decision, every vote, every goal, every ambition must be weighed with only one thought in mind:

WHAT IS BEST FOR MONTANA?

That thought, and that alone, will be my only guide, just as it will be yours. It is not my purpose to spell out what you are expected to do. None of us are MIRACLE MEN, but working together we can achieve some definite goals which will be beneficial to all the people.

The opportunity is at hand. WE MUST NOT FAIL. Let us not waste our energies in petty bickering. Instead, let us pledge here and now to live up to the oath of office which all of us are so proud to have had the privilege of taking.

First, let me say to you that during the next 60 days when you are in session YOUR BUSINESS IS MY BUSINESS. My office door will be open to you. Perhaps my experience, unique to any previous Montana governor, might be helpful from your standpoint, since it has been my good fortune to have had the privilege of serving in both the House of Representatives and the Senate.

Perhaps my experience as a working man and a practical businessman will be of value also.

My love for Montana and this adopted country of mine has increased down through the years with the realization of the priceless opportunities and privileges which we enjoy here. What Montana and the United States has to offer its citizens is in sharp contrast to what the countries in Europe and the rest of the world can give. This opinion is based on my experience and observations as a youth, as a soldier in France in World War I, and as a frequent overseas visitor since then. Truly, we have a great heritage to protect. Definitely, you can count on me in the attempt to solve our mutual problems.

Likewise, if there is any assistance you might need from any state official or employee, they are at your service. There is no reason why there should be any friction between any of the branches of government: LEGISLATIVE, JUDICIAL OR EXECUTIVE. All of us are servants of the people.

In the accomplishments of our task we will have to enlist the aid of many citizens from every walk of life. Many groups and individuals have information which will be helpful in our deliberations. From them we can expect constructive suggestions and counsel.

Our job is three fold:

FIRST, we must make the appropriations and provide the legislative machinery to keep the wheels of government in operation for the next two years;

SECOND, we must correct any evils which may exist; and

THIRD, we must build for the future.

As we set out to accomplish our objectives we must stamp out any spirit of vindictiveness. Our examination of what has happened should be with a view of gathering from the experience of yesterday something constructive for tomorrow, as well as the months and years ahead.

Our Montana constitution provides that at the beginning of each session, your governor shall, by message, inform the Legislative Assembly of the condition of the state and recommend such measures as he shall deem required. In doing so, let us be realistic and face the facts.

On June 30, 1949, the general fund had a surplus of $14,736,025.14, of which more than $6,600,000 was saved during

the fiscal year from July 1, 1948 to June 30, 1949. Your state controller estimates that the general fund surplus on June 30, 1953, will be approximately $2,000,000. In other words, in the last four fiscal years we will have spent approximately $12,700,000 more than our income. As you well know, a portion of this spending of the surplus was for new buildings.

THE BIG DECISION we have to make right at the start of this session is this:

DO WE MONTANANS INTEND TO LIVE WITHIN OUR INCOME?

My answer is an emphatic YES. If you agree, then we have a tremendous job on our hands. It will take the most painstaking analysis of every appropriation request. This will require the wholehearted cooperation of all state officials. We must ask ourselves these questions:

DO MONTANANS WANT TO PAY MORE TAXES?

DO MONTANANS WANT TO CONTINUE DEFICIT SPENDING?

CAN WE CONSCIENTIOUSLY PLEDGE OURSELVES TO SPEND A DOLLAR WHEN WE KNOW WE WILL HAVE ONLY 75 CENTS TO PAY OUT?

General fund appropriation requests total $50,748,651. This figure does not include legislative expenses. Neither does it include other items likely to be proposed. General fund revenue for the next two fiscal years, based on estimates of the controller, will approximate $37,188,520.

The two-mill property tax levy for state purposes has not been levied for many, many years and it is my earnest hope it will not be necessary in the coming biennium.

The controller, in compliance with legislation approved two years ago, has analyzed and reduced the requests. This should be helpful in your deliberations. However, in trimming the requests to attempt to balance them with anticipated revenue, such items as new buildings, major repairs, creation of special and non-recurring items, and long-range programs, were cut out. Therefore, it is obvious that some of these cuts must be considered in your final determination of appropriations.

The solution to the problem will not be a simple one. The problem is complex. We must not turn back the pages of progress. Somehow, we must see to it that our children are not deprived of educational opportunities for which we are responsible. We have a definite responsibility to maintain our custodial institutions, as well as the standards of the Department of Public Welfare and similar agencies.

Had time permitted a request would have been made to all branches of government asking for a re-analysis of their appropriation requests prior to the start of the legislative session. That was impossible, so it is my hope that between now and the time the sub-committees of your House Appropriations and Senate Finance and Claims committees meet with these officials that the latter re-appraise their needs in the light of potential income. Perhaps some savings can be made during the balance of the 1952-53 fiscal year.

You can count on me to assist in any way possible. It is respectfully requested that an early meeting be held with the SENATE FINANCE AND CLAIMS and the HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS committees to review the fiscal situation. Let us not delay.

In the brief period since the people of Montana selected me as their governor every effort has been made to get a real perspective of the problems affecting all of the people. Time did not permit a complete study of each and every unit of government, not even conferences with the heads of all the various institutions or the members of all the various boards and commissions. However, generally, there has been a very cooperative attitude which has been most helpful.

My colleagues on the board of examiners have pledged their cooperation and we confidently look forward to working together for the best interests of the state. That same spirit prevails with respect to the other elective officers of Montana.

Needless to say, the legislature will take advantage of the great mass of information compiled by your "Little Hoover" Reorganization Commission. This group of Senators and Representatives has been working diligently these past two years. From the Commission's treasure of research will come many, many constructive suggestions as to governmental procedure, practices, reorganization and recommendations which are deserving of sincere study and thoughtful consideration.

The members of the Commission were good enough to meet with me on several occasions during the past several weeks and to make available considerable information which has been most helpful. Certainly, your body should give consideration to continuing the group. In addition to the efforts of individual members and the Commission's secretary, scores of experts in various fields of government and private endeavor have made invaluable contributions.

Likewise, there were many other special committees, official and semi-official, which have studied various problems for your consideration. The people who served on these committees are sincere, conscientious, and are deserving of our deepest gratitude. We can best express that by taking advantage of the information they have gathered and interpreting it wisely.

It is respectfully urged that the Senate and House name joint committees as soon as possible to analyze the problems at the State Industrial School at Miles City and the State Prison at Deer Lodge. Both institutions will require supplemental appropriations, but there are more than fiscal matters to consider. We have a responsibility of great import which neglect on our part will not diminish. If there are additional supplemental appropriation requests, these likewise should be carefully examined and analyzed.

Bricks and mortar alone, or money, cannot solve our educational or custodial institution problems. From the staffs of these institutions, as well as the other departments, will come intelligent suggestions for improvements and savings. The great majority of state employees are just as conscious of the absolute necessity for sound, stable fiscal policies as are the legislators and the elective officers. Let us not hesitate to enlist their help.

The only institution which was visited by me in the past few weeks was the State Industrial School at Miles City. Members of the Board of Education and the local Executive Board have given considerable study to the school's problems, the most important of which is the rehabilitation of these unfortunate youngsters into normal, law-abiding citizens.

Certainly, there should be no political interference in such an institution, but it does need fiscal and business guidance. It is unfortunate that the farm and facilities were permitted to deteriorate over a long period of years. Perhaps the aid of other state agencies can be enlisted to assist the Miles City and other institutions in the solution of their farm problems particularly.

Considerable time has been devoted to a study of the state's highway problems. The Highway Commission, members of the Governor's Interim Committee and Highway Department employees were indeed helpful. Roads are vital to the state's economy. They are needed everywhere.

As you are aware, four of the five Highway Commissioners indicated their willingness to resign at my pleasure. This spirit of cooperation is most appreciated. These Commissioners gave me valuable information and suggestions. You can depend on it, the new Commission will be given a free rein without gubernatorial interference.

Shortly, they will present a program in an effort to solve the financial dilemma and provide the means of matching federal aid. My suggestions to them will be to tighten their spending, affect savings and instill public confidence. If the Highway Department does that, you no doubt can help them in their quest for additional funds.

For the period ending June 30, 1955, the sum of $20,112,007 in state funds is needed to match $31,142,908 in Federal funds for total construction of $51,254,915. Our estimated highway income from Jan. 1, 1953, to June 30, 1955, is $34,800,000, of which an estimated $21,600,000 will be expended for prior obligations, such as debt service, maintenance, administration, and other recurrent charges. This leaves but $13,200,000 to match Federal aid, or $6,912,007 short of the $20,112,007 needed. If savings could be made of 5 to 10 percent of the $21,600,000 to be expended which is unmatched with Federal aid, perhaps the legislature could work out some satisfactory finance program in order that all Federal aid available could be obtained.

There must not be any political padding in any state department, whether it be in the Highway, Liquor, or any other branch of the state government. If state employees have time to devote to political activity while on duty, people naturally assume they do not have work to do. All state employees should give full value on their jobs. If they do not, there is no place for them on the payroll. This is a must if we are to substitute business for politics in state government.

My hope is that your deliberations on the legislation which you consider, perhaps 500 to 600 bills, will be with a view of obtaining quality, rather than quantity.

Let us not waste valuable time and taxpayers' money on proposed legislation which we know has no merit and no chance for final passage. From experience, we know how oftentimes we are encouraged to lend our names to proposals which are not worthy. As for me, there have been no promises to any individual, group or corporation that a bill scheduled for consideration has my prior approval. When you finally have acted and sent the bill to my desk, then my best judgment will be the determining factor. Never, with God's help, will any pressure, prejudice, partisanship or any other consideration interfere with my sincerest purpose to do what's best for Montana.

Intensive study should be given to the proposals for revision of the Unemployment Compensation benefits and taxes, which should result in relief to the unemployed worker as well as the tax of the employer. Certainly, consideration should be given to providing increased benefits to injured workmen insured under Workmen's Compensation laws.

The matter of extending the time for World War II veterans to apply for adjusted compensation is worthy of consideration.

Our death toll on the highways, which has shown a sharp upturn, must be halted. An investigation to make certain the highway patrol functions properly is in order.

The inequalities in the present method of taxing small trailers should be corrected.

In dealing with the difficulties which confront us immediately, we should not be blinded to the opportunities which loom ahead. Montana truly is the Treasure State. Our greatest resource is our children and it is up to us to provide the facilities, the livelihood and the encouragement for them to remain here to continue to develop for the generations to come.

In the last 30 years Montana's population has increased but seven and seven-tenths percent, while the eight Rocky Mountain states have shown a gain of more than fifty-five percent. That is a measure of the job ahead of us.

We have the brains, the resources, the capital, the people, — Let's coordinate them and get on with the business of developing the Treasure State. We need new industry, more people. We can and must go forward.

Our water, our minerals, our timber, our magnetic scenery, — these are the assets we must conserve wisely and develop soundly.

Coupled with their development we must ever seek to expand our processing, manufacturing, trade and tourist facilities. Nor, should we overlook the vital importance of good relations with our neighbors in adjacent Canada and the states. We can be thankful that the two great national parks, Glacier and Yellowstone, are of such great benefit to our economy. Every effort should be made to expand and advertise our tourist attractions to induce more tourists to visit Montana and to stay longer.

Water is our greatest heritage. Through legislation and by decrees of courts, water rights are established and determined by priority of use. We must be diligent and protect our rights, so that there is available to coming generations sufficient water for all possible development for irrigation of our lands and for domestic and industrial purposes. We should plan wisely and should cooperate with the other states of the Missouri and Columbia river basins toward sound programs safeguarding Montana's right to all water that may be required for the future development of the state.

Progress in providing electricity and telephones to all rural residents, as well as folks in cities and towns, has been made. But, our goal is to aid in REA and other programs so that the job will be completed. That task is to make available to every possible farm family electricity, telephones and other modern facilities.

In the 18 years since the Water Conservation Board has been in operation it has developed 386,214 acres. During the last 50 years since it was created the U. S. Bureau of Reclamation has developed in Montana 360,631 acres, of which 310,335 acres were developed from 1908 to 1911. Our water Conservation Board program has become the model for other states.

President-elect Eisenhower, his Secretary of the Interior, Douglas McKay, and leaders in Congress have promised more grass roots participation in reclamation and river basin developments. We want nothing of plans which would take away our rights and make us tenants of absentee landlord bureaucrats in Washington.

But it is important that Montana take the necessary steps to insure the maximum of benefits which Montanans should receive.

The legislature is to be congratulated for its wisdom two years ago in purchasing one million four hundred and fifty thousand dollars in water conservation board bonds from the R. F. C. These bonds had been sold by the state to finance the construction of seven major irrigation projects. By June 30, 1953, more than

three hundred and thirty-three thousands of dollars will have been returned as a result of this purchase. Certainly, this has improved the financial structure of your Water Conservation Board.

Since the discovery of gold in 1862, Montana has always been known as a great mineral producer. Through 1951, gold, silver, copper, zinc and lead have yielded three and one-half billion dollars in wealth. New mining processes indicate a particularly bright future in the production of low-grade ores. We have vast reservoirs of coal. New minerals are becoming of increasing importance to the state's economy.

But, from a small beginning in 1916, the petroleum industry has grown to a point where it provides a bright star of hope for the future. Geologists estimate the Williston Basin will produce two and one-half billion barrels of oil, much of it in Montana. Practically every major oil company, and many independents, have interests in the Williston Basin, which is receiving the biggest "play" of any region in the United States. Exploratory activity has brought newcomers to Montana and increased the population of eastern Montana. Millions have been and will be expended for leases and explorations. Millions more will go for drilling.

We Montanans have a priceless heritage in school lands, which we must administer wisely. Various legislative proposals will be presented for your consideration, and my earnest plea is that you give them intensive study with a view of the long-range benefits to be derived.

In our deliberations let us not shirk our responsibilities. Let us be fair to labor, agriculture, business and to professional men and women. Let us not be unfair to our children. Let's balance our budget. Let's substitute business for politics. Together, let's work for what's best for Montana. With God's help we will succeed.

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